

Designer Colson asks:

Are we Being Conned?

Have you wondered occasionally if you are being “conned” by manufacturers into spending more money for little or no gain, all in the name of modern technology?

When setting out to decide what to build your next vessel out of you are faced with a vast array of construction methods and materials?

I would like to suggest its very hard to go past the tried and true wood and wood composites. When it comes to the amateur builder (or the professional for that matter) no other product is quite so “idiot proof” or as economical.

The value of light weight and high strength is well known and acknowledged, but what is forgotten (or is it ignored?) is that wood really is good. (See first edition of Boating Queensland.) What is simpler than plywood, especially for the hull and topsides?

Perhaps it’s because you use only half the glass/resin content that manufacturers would encourage you towards foam or P.V.C. cores. If the vessel is to be subjected to high impact loadings then Balsa or Ply/Balsa/Ply is quite superior. Resistance to local denting is a concern for sandwich structures, commonly happening in deck and topsides resulting in unsightly marks.

In these instances balsa or plywood “Cores” offer good protection because of the high densities.

Balsa cores are favoured by some builders for high-load areas in open 60 ft yachts and now mindful of the extensive P.V.C. – core shear problems of the last generation of Whitbread 60 yachts several yachts have used balsa in high impact areas. Most boats are built with minimum weight cores that fulfil the strength requirements. Lighter cores require more complex (expensive) laminates. The basic strengths of material demonstrates that foams are fundamentally weaker than balsa.

In his basement Barry Colson is also building a high-performance “trainer” he designed.

The 3.5 metre “Tri-Star” is produced in New Zealand as a kit-set yacht – just like a model aeroplane by Chris Brummel Yachts Ltd.

It’s best described as a cross between a 12 foot skiff and an International Moth. Colson says he had intended to sell them in Australia, but the government duty is 26 per cent, “so much for C.E.R.!”

The yacht is cat-rigged (mainsail, no headsail) but has an asymmetrical gennaker for downwind power-rides. The yacht’s versatility is really appealing. I can sail her myself or with Gill for joy riding, or teach Seth to sail rather than just pushing him off the beach and relying on someone else to train him.

His next yacht is likely to feature a canting keel and perhaps rig as he admires the French designers.

“I do feel one of the things that made New Zealand a great yachting nation was their preparedness to try innovative designs.”

“In the early 80’s Bruce Farr, Ron Holland, Jim Young, Laurie Davidson and many more pushed the envelope and Kiwis built their yachts, but over recent years they have flocked to one designs.

“That was one of the appeals of Australia. It appears to me that Queenslanders are prepared to appreciate and assimilate innovative ideas.” *BQ*